

Commissioner George Brown at Tahiti, 1843

Colin Newbury

INTRODUCTION

George Brown was appointed as the first United States Commissioner to the Sandwich Islands by President John Tyler on 3 March 1843. His role was to look after the interests of American citizens on behalf of a government which was reluctant to recognize Hawai'i as a separate state, unlike France and Great Britain which had concluded treaties recognizing this status. His instructions of 15 March 1843 do not contain any reference to a mission to the Society Islands. In the absence of other indications, it is likely he took his passage via Panama, hoping to find a vessel bound for Mexico and Hawai'i. The vessel, however, went to Tahiti. He finally reached Hawai'i in October 1843. His subsequent stormy dealings with the Hawaiian government have been covered in several standard works.¹ A new President, James Polk, recalled him in 1846, and the vessel he sailed on was lost with all hands and passengers in Micronesia.

Undoubtedly there is room for a re-assessment of Brown. These particular letters to his family and friends are of interest for several reasons: he was at Tahiti in the last months of Tahitian independence; and he saw many of the older missionaries and Queen Pomare before they were embroiled in French occupation and a civil war.

In short, Brown arrived at Pape'ete during a lull in the gathering crisis which surrounded missionary and Tahitian efforts to stave off the attentions of foreign powers and control the conditions of foreign trade and settlement in the Society Islands as a group. As is well known, the period of the 1830s saw a determined effort on the part

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of the Protestant mission to counter the arrival of Catholic missionaries in 1836, and an equally vigorous enforcement of the rights of French nationals to settle under treaties concluded by Admiral Dupetit-Thouars in 1838. Consular rivalry between J.A. Moerenhout, representing American and French interests, and George Pritchard, representing both the missionaries and British settlers, aggravated the potential for international rivalry and left the Tahitians torn between the Queen's officers and the district churches, on the one hand, and a small body of chiefs and officials opposed to the Pomares.

Some of this latter faction, under the guidance of Moerenhout, asked officially for French advice in 1841. A year later, when Admiral Dupetit-Thouars annexed the Marquesas group, he was enabled to take advantage of this source of collaboration and establish a provisional Protectorate by a mixture of threats and bluff in September 1842.

George Brown arrived, then, nearly 11 months after the establishment of a "provisional government" consisting of Consul Moerenhout and two naval officers left by Dupetit-Thouars, pending approval of his initiative in France. In practice these officials were able to do very little, and their position was undermined by the return of George Pritchard, early in 1843, and the interference of Capt. J. Toup Nicolas in judicial cases involving British subjects. For, as the document shows, George Pritchard who had been a London Missionary Society missionary at Tahiti since 1824 and British consul from 1837, ignored Foreign Office instructions to give up his religious office and combined preaching with close advice in civil and commercial affairs in the Tahitian government.

Brown does not tell us much about that government or the French, though he does touch on two points which were fundamental to its predicament in a society open to foreign settlement and trade. First, great store had been set by the missionaries and by the chiefs on the publication of civil codes of laws, based on simple Christian precepts, ever since 1819. The enforcement of these laws through district judges appointed from senior Tahitian families and the organization of a police force were rich in consequences, leading to regular taxation in the form of tribute, elementary courts, fines in money or labor services, and, to a lesser extent, the abolition of customs considered unethical in Christian communities. Inevitably, too, some of these precepts were held to apply to foreign lawbreakers. The sale and lease of land to Europeans was prohibited in 1842. A law against Roman Catholic doctrines had occasioned earlier French intervention; and

rough handling of Europeans by the police (*mutoi*) was a constant theme in consular correspondence. In 1843 all laws held to apply to foreigners were translated and issued from the mission press in a special pamphlet (possibly the one seen by Brown). In some ways the ability of Pomare's government to conduct its business according to European precepts, recognized in international law, had improved to the point where it could be taken seriously by visiting consuls and naval officers. Indeed, it was precisely this ability that was called in question, when civil and criminal codes were held to apply to foreign residents.

In other ways, however, the evidence of Brown's letter suggests that Tahitian society had not been able to come to terms with some of the more pernicious by-products of an elementary barter and monetized trading system. The sale of cheap spirits had been frequently prohibited; temperance societies had been formed in the 1830s. Even allowing for Brown's personal convictions on the subject, it is clear from other evidence left by the missionaries that examples of total sobriety were few, and cases of outright drunkenness were many, by the end of the 1830s. Brown does not examine the role of whalers in this respect. Had he done so, he might have recognized that the spirits traffic was part of an exchange system which had grown very rapidly to meet the requirements of the American, British, and French whalers, as well as the crews of other merchantmen and naval vessels. By 1842 Tahiti was a favored port of call. The result of this attention was to end the legal independence of a missionary outpost and a Polynesian government overwhelmed by the applied values and technology of an alien culture.

The original text of Brown's two letters has not been changed except where spelling and punctuation might obscure his meaning. Clearly, these are personal letters intended for family and a small group of friends and are valuable for the clear reactions and prejudices of a newcomer to Polynesia and his observations of Tahitian and foreign personalities.

HAWAIIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NOTE

The George Brown manuscript collection was acquired by the Society with the aid of grants from the Atherton Family Foundation and the Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation. Contributions made to the Society in memory of the late Janet E. Bell helped to meet the remaining cost. This collection is now available for research use at the Society's library.

LETTER ONE

Papeete Island of Tahiti
28th August 1843

My dear Wife, children, and friends,

On the 15th of July I wrote you a few lines from the Island of Cocos and sent the letter to Paita² by an American Whaler, but will now commence at the time I left Panama and give you a history of my *experiences* up to the present date when thank God I am safe landed at the Capital of the Society Islands. On a Sunday morning the 11th of June I embarked on board the tender of the English frigate Vindictive,³ having been (as I wrote you) offered a passage to Tahiti by the officer who came passenger in her, and by the Eng. Consul Mr. Perry.⁴ The vessel was a schooner of about 50 Tons and was under command of the second master of the frigate, with a crew of 10 men. Previous to embarking I observed that the Master was intoxicated although early in the morning, but was in hopes that it would soon be over. The Eng. Consul his daughter & governess and two merchants of Panama also went on board intending to spend the day at the Island of Taboga a beautiful spot about nine miles from Panama, where the Consul had a house. We went on board about eleven, leaving the Master to follow in his own boat. In about an hour he made his appearance drunk as a brute, his men got him below into the cabin where he tumbled on the floor, in a state of insensibility, & where he remained during the rest of the day. At about seven o'clock in the evening, we arrived at Taboga, (it having been calm the whole day) and went on shore to the Consul's house where we had a good supper & passed the night. I felt, you may believe, rather unpleasantly, in the expectation of having to pass some weeks in the company of a drunken Master and told the Consul that I should take out my trunks, unless I could be assured that there would nothing further of the kind happen. He said that he would go on board & see the Master and had but little doubt that he might prevent a recurrence. The next morning I was up by daylight and off to the beach to get some shells and was pretty successful as you will see in the course of time. After breakfast the Consul went on board, and on his return said that the Master was much ashamed and very humble, and faithfully promised that nothing more of the kind should happen. I also went on board, and he appeared very sorry, begged me to think nothing more of it & I should have no occasion

of complaint. Of course I said what was proper and the affair dropped. In the evening we got under weigh (after bidding the Consul good bye who had been very polite & kind) and proceeded on our passage. I soon found that I was on board of a very dull sailer, and that I must expect a long passage. I also discovered that I must bid adieu to all hopes of comfort. The vessel & cabin was dirty & full of cockroaches, The Caboose all to pieces & the only articles to cook in the two coppers one teakettle & a frying pan. The day after we left, it commenced raining, and with but little cessation continued so to do for the month that we were beating about, until we arrived at the Cocos Islands⁵ where we had to put in for water. The Master had not calculated for over a six weeks passage and the supplies began to grow short. We had had so much wet weather that our sails & rigging became rotton, and nothing on board to replace them, and our prospects were any thing but pleasant. On board, it was 'hail fellow all round' no discipline, and vulgarity, and disorder, were the order of both day & night. The Master however kept sober, indeed I believe he drank nothing, but he was ignorant & stupid, neither a sailor or a gentleman, and I began to think that providence had deserted us, when on the evening of the day previous to our departure from the Cocos, an American whaler came in, from whom I procured every thing we needed & paid for it myself taking an order from the Master on the British Consul here. I employed most of my time at the Cocos in collecting shells. I found nothing very curious or very rare but some that I had not collected before. Capt. Norton who commanded the Charles W. Morgan was a very kind man and supplied every thing that we wished in a very cheerful manner, and it was a Godsend that we met him, as we saw not another vessel, until our arrival here. August 5th we crossed the Line in 107 West Longitude. Aug. 20th made Magdalen⁶ Island one of the Marquesas, 24th made Teokea one of the Pomouto group or the Dangerous Archipelago and the next day run through the passage having low islands on both sides of us and following the track of Capt. Cook; and on the 28th, today, arrived here & came to anchor about 11 A.M., after a fatiguing and harassing passage of 78 days from Panama. When we arrived, the men were out of every thing except beef & pork & water all other eatables had disappeared, and in another week they must have been in a desperate predicament. The vessel's bottom was covered with grass & barnacles, and to give you an idea of her sailing the most we were able to get out of her was six & a half knots per hour. Most of the time, the first part of the passage, she

would not go, more than three, but after we got the trade winds she went along from four to five. We had also about four hundred miles current in our favor the last three weeks, averaging from 10-40 miles per day a great help to us. I ought to mention that I talked a good deal with the Master on temperance, & he promised to give up drinking and said that he would go to Mr. Pritchard when he arrived here and sign the pledge, but I much doubt him. He has not stamina enough to resist temptation. On my arrival I sent a note to Mr. Blackler the Am. Consul and in a short time Mr. Chapman, the Vice Consul came off in a boat & took me on shore. Mr. Blackler⁷ was absent, having gone to the leeward islands, but is expected back in a day or two. I have taken rooms in a snug little house belonging to Mr. Gifford an American Carpenter, and shall eat at the Hotel,⁸ apparently a very good house, kept by a Mr. Segar an American. I was surprised on my arrival to hear that a Captain of an English frigate had taken possession of the Sandwich Islands,⁹ but I do not feel at all afraid of the result. There have been two or three vessels sailed for Woahoo [O'ahu] the past month, and if we had had a decent passage from Panama, I should now have been there. However there is a vessel expected every day from Sydney, bound there, so I shall not be detained here more than a fortnight I hope, which will give me ample time to do all that is necessary. This appears to be a beautiful Island, but I am disappointed in the appearance of this place, which has not the appearance of having been settled more than two or three years. It is fast approaching to civilization however, as I have already seen lots of drunkards. I must say nothing yet however, as I have had no time to learn any thing. It is now under a provisionary government (as regards its foreign affairs) of the French Consul and two French officers.¹⁰ The Queen having the control of the Police and the internal regulations. The Vice Consul has notified the Government of my arrival.

30th. Aug. Yesterday the Vice Consul received a note from the French Government offering me every service in their power and at about one o'clock the three viz Governor, Captain of the Port and Commissaire called upon me and passed an hour in conversation. The English Consul Mr. Pritchard also called. Last evening Mr. Blackler our Consul returned, and invited me to move to his house, apologising however for its being new and not entirely finished. I declined his polite invitation however, as I was well situated and I knew that his house being in disorder, it would give him a great deal

of trouble to have me there. He is very civil. This morning he called upon me, and while we were sitting together, I observed a native man & woman come into the house and look into the room where we were, & immediately go out again, the Consul not observing them. I asked Mrs. Gifford who they were. She said they were the King & Queen.¹¹ Mr. Blackler immediately rose and speaking to them called them back and introduced them to me. The Queen said that she came to see a Cupboard that Mr. Gifford had been making for her and seeing a stranger had retired. She shook hands with me, and said she was glad to see me. She is a very handsome woman about 28 or 30 years of age¹² and was dressed in one garment alone a slack or loose gown & neither stockings or shoes. The King had on a shirt with a Pareu or cloth around his loins and his feet also bare. I told her majesty that I should do myself the honor to call upon her the next day. She said she should be happy to see me, that she was not in her own house now. She had lost her foster mother three days previous & was staying with the widower¹³ to console him, but would be at her own house to receive me tomorrow. She stayed a short time, then arose, gave me her hand, said 'Iaorana' i.e. 'Peace be with you' & departed. Her husband is a pretty good looking man, but nothing extra. Her eldest son was with them a boy about eight years old.¹⁴ Mr. Blackler & myself then returned the calls of the Governor, and other officials, and were caught in a heavy shower of rain which had continued all day with but little intermission. There are two American ships here both whalers. One the Enterprise of Nantucket Capt. Cannon the other the Euphrates Capt. Upham, the latter a very fine man, and much of a gentleman who was obliged to come in to repair his ship she having been on a coral reef. The former a clever good natured man enough but the noisiest one I ever saw. There are also a number of small vessels under English & native colors,¹⁵ and a French Corvette of 28 guns.¹⁶

Aug. 31. I have been to call upon the Queen Pomarree. She received us (the Consul the interpreter & myself) in her own house, a fine building of one story, and furnished in the English style, her husband in the room with her. She was dressed in a green satin loose gown, apparently her only garment, and barefooted, her husband in his shirt and Trowsers, also barefooted, but she certainly is a very handsome woman, by all odds, the handsomest I have seen here, her face oval, bright black eyes, fine white teeth and a fine head of hair. She is rather fleshy about the size of Mrs. Masury. She was very

pleasant and gracious and replied to my official speech in a very handsome and dignified manner. I then entered into conversation with her and among other things told her that I regretted to see so much intemperance in the place, both among the Natives & foreigners; that it was the occasion of most if not all of the trouble, she & her subjects have met with. That the laws against the use and introduction of ardent spirits were all very well, but were entirely useless, unless it became unfashionable to use them. That example was much better than precept. That it was the duty of her husband & herself to set that example to her subjects, and that she had an example before *them* in the King & Queen of the Sandwich Islands who had joined a temperance society and been followed by a large proportion of their people.¹⁷ She replied that what I had said was good. She knew that intemperance was a great curse and she should be happy to see an end to it. She was not aware that the King & Queen of the Sandwich Islands had joined the temperance society and was surprised, said that the plan was a good one, and that she had no doubt that her subjects would follow her example were she to sign. I urged her so to do & her husband, she said she would think of it and thought she might, & would bring the plan of a temperance society before her chiefs when they met. She behaved in a very dignified manner and I doubt if even Queen Victoria could have been more so, though she might have appeared more haughty. The King said hardly any thing, but appeared to coincide with his wife. We had an audience of nearly an hour. This evening I took a ride out with the Consul in his fourwheeled carriage or Dearborn wagon. The road is only wide enough for one vehicle. The ride was delightful and cool. The climate is splendid and the country & views magnificent.

Sept. 1st. Dined today with the Consul on board of the English schooner Sultana Capt. Scott whom I knew some years since in Barcelona, a very fine man. He has his wife & child with him and employs his vessel between this & the neighboring islands and Sydney.

2d. Today is Saturday with you but it is Sunday the 3d. here.¹⁸ The missionaries having come here from round Cape of Good Hope & so got one day ahead of us. At nine A.M. I attended the native church, a plain old fashioned building without a steeple, looks like some of the meeting houses you will see in the country towns of New

England. It has galleries on three sides, and benches with backs like those in our old town hall. There were about 700 people in church, of course I could not understand what was said. There was the usual quality of attention paid the preacher, but an incessant noise kept up by the feet of the congregation. After the services were over, the Lord's supper was administered to about 160 communicants who appeared for the most part attentive & serious. Though a little brat of about two years old kept up a continual yelling outside, throwing stones at every one who came near him, untill his mother went out, brought him in, after being well stoned, and gave him, not a whipping, but the breast before the whole congregation. Sucking stopped his mouth. I dined this afternoon with our Consul at his house in company with the French Consul, and after dinner rode out with him in another direction than that of our last ride. The road was worse, but the views were splendid. A brig arrived today from Sydney & New Zealand bound to the Sandwich Islands, will sail in a week or ten days, and I shall probably go in her. I forgot to say that at eleven o'clock I went to the English church, where I heard a sermon from Mr. Pritchard the Eng. Consul and one of the missionaries; he also administered the Sacrament at the Native church, Mr. Barff¹⁹ the missionary who preached there not being ordained. The sermon was a plain extemporaneous discourse, evincing no great talent, from the text 'I have fought a good fight &c.' The singing in the native church was rather good than otherwise. At the English church the attendance was poor, not more than 30.

3d. Sept. Rode out this afternoon about four miles to Papaoa to see Mr. Knott²⁰ one of the oldest missionaries living and the translator of the Bible into the Tahitian language. We found him and his wife alone. He is a very interesting man but in bad health having had an attack of Palsy and during our conversation, which was exciting to him, he was much agitated & in continual motion. Poor man! he had lately heard bad news. The merchant in Sydney to whom he had trusted all his property had failed, and he feared that nearly all had been lost. The missionary society in London had also written to him a very affectionate letter telling him that he must either go to England or the Colony of New Holland or they should stop his salary of eighty pounds a year. Thus compelling him, [old?] & sick, to leave a beautiful climate, where he had resided 48 years, or to be deprived of the bare support they allowed him. The ostensible reason they give is that they wish the island to be under the charge of a

younger & more energetic set of men, but I believe this is not the true one. Mrs. K. [Knott]²¹ is not all she should be liking a glass oftener than is good for her and the Society is afraid of her example. I am informed by one of the missionaries however that he doubts whether the Society will stick to their text in his case at least. Two of the old missionaries have been ordered to leave under similar forfeitures and one of them Mr. Henry²² is now at Sydney. The other, Mr. Wilson,²³ the Natives would not let leave. I did not stay long at Mr. Knotts, but am going again soon to pass some time with him. On my return, just at I had got into the village, and was riding carelessly and upon a walk, my horse started upon a gallop & I had a nice roll off, upon my head, but it being very thick I met with no damage. His Majesty, dressed in American style, dined at the Hotel yesterday. He understands English, but will not speak it. He is intemperate at times, as I hear, but I have not seen any thing of it as yet.

4th. Last night about nine o'clock there was a great noise, in a native house directly in the rear of mine and a large crowd of people, police & others collected. It was occasioned by the beating of a woman by her husband both of them being drunk. She had run off & sold a handkerchief and he had beat her for it. The noise was kept up for more than an hour, when the woman was removed. The man then began a howling, interspersed with complaints that his wife was stolen. 'They have stolen my wife, yes stolen her, stolen her. Is there no law here? fine times when they steal a man's wife', and he kept up the noise till my landlord went and tried to shame him. He then ceased for a time, but kept it up at intervals untill he fell asleep from drunkenness & exhaustion. This morning there was another row in a house alongside of us occasioned also by drunkenness; a brother and sister commenced fighting, and after they had torn down part of the house, the row was stopped. The howling however continued for some time. This afternoon I dined at the house of the British Consul with a large party. The dinner was pretty well got up. A number of kinds of wines were on the table and freely used. The Master of the vessel I came in used them as freely as anyone, and after dinner drank as freely of brandy at another house where we stopped. So you see that I was right in trusting but little to his good resolves. He is a poor tool, and I am informed here by both English & Americans, that most of the officers of the frigate he belonged to were intemperate. Intemperance is the fashion here both among the natives & foreigners,

I have heard a great deal, and have seen a great deal, so that I can believe what I have heard, but I do not wish as yet to put down my impressions, preferring to leave a decided opinion, until I am certain from my own observation that what I am told is the veritable truth. I am afraid however that true Christianity is but little known here, and that the missionaries have been any thing but successful. Although they have been on these islands nearly fifty years, and the American missionaries little more than twenty years at the Sandwich Islands, yet the latter have been much more successful if all stories are true. This race of people are a fine race. I have seen noble specimens of human nature both among males & females, and it is a pity to be obliged to think that they must ere long become extinct, unless different measures are pursued. There are now only about eight thousand inhabitants on this island.²⁴ When Cook was here, there were between forty & fifty thousand, and this is Christianising a people. Spirits are prohibited to be imported, but the law is a dead letter, sufficient is smuggled to keep the whole population intoxicated, and while examples of drunkenness are common among those in high standing both among natives & foreigners and even among those of the latter who are employed to teach them better things, it cannot be expected that the common class will improve. From what I have yet seen, I am not aware that there are any tetotallers on the island, unless myself & Mr. Knott the missionary who only offered me water to drink, still there may be others among the missionaries whom I have not seen. Another American Whaler arrived today. The Chariot of Warren, Rhode Island, she is on her way home full with 3200 barrels on board. This letter will go in her. The noisy Captain has sailed.

7th. Sept. Nothing particular has occurred since my last date untill today, when I took tea at the Mission house. Mr. Buchanan is the head of this district and lives at the Mission house. Mr. Smee the printer of the mission resides with him;²⁵ besides these there were at the table Mrs. Buchanan, Mrs. Pritchard, Mr. and Mrs. Moore from Papaoa, Mr. Barff, and one or two other gentlemen whose names I forget. I went with Dr. Johnson a physician here and a very worthy man. At table Mr. Moore said he understood I was a champion of temperance and this brought on a conversation on all sides, during which Dr. Johnson said to Mrs. Pritchard 'Do you believe there is one strictly sober native on the island from the Queen to the lowest Native'. Her reply was 'No!' and then stated that Mr.

Pritchard had found her the Queen intoxicated within three weeks, but she was excused on account of excitement from the death of her foster mother. This was a hard confession to make and I was not so sorry to hear it from her, as it proved to me that I could depend somewhat at least on statements made to me by others, whose evidence might not be considered so unbiased as that of the missionaries. I heard at table more than I have either time or inclination to put down, but enough to confirm me in the opinion I have been obliged to come to that unless other and more effective measures are soon taken, the fine race of these islands must become extinct. I told them at table plainly that it behoved them to set the example, and that it must be commenced by those in high authority whose example would have an effect, and I mentioned not only the Queen and King but the American & English Consul, the latter of whom especially being a missionary, it behoved to be the first to commence the good work. Mr. Moore replied that he was a temperance man and had nothing in his house, the rest said nothing but smiled. The shot hit all round. I visited the printing office, a new building; they were employed in printing the laws of the island as regards foreigners.²⁶ I was presented with a testament and grammar of this language, and a number of school books, and the Gospels of St. Mark & St. John in the Samoan language, or that of the Navigators islands. I passed a pleasant evening. Tomorrow I attend a native feast in the morning and visit Mr. Knott in the afternoon. So I shall have something to write about.

Sept. 8th. I have just returned from a native feast or 'Maa'. A number of resident and other foreigners were invited, and his Majesty the King was there. The place at which we assembled was about three miles from the harbor, a beautiful spot on the banks of a small stream. The floor of a native hut had been covered with fresh cut grass, and the table consisted of the leaves of the Purau tree. When I arrived I observed four mounds of earth which I soon discovered to be the native ovens. After the whole company had assembled, consisting of about twenty whites and twice that number of natives male & female they began to uncover the mounds. I watched the operation; with a hoe, a native removed the soil, then came a covering of Purau leaves, then the stones which had been heated to bake the meats & vegetables, then more leaves, and then the viands, consisting of pigs, whole Turkeys, chickens, ducks, yams, sweet potatoes, bread fruit and Tara—all of which had been laid on heated

stones at the bottom. It all looked good. The meats were done to a charm, and were pulled to pieces by the hands of the cooks, and laid on the dishes which were other Purau leaves, and then transferred to the leafy table. We all sat down on mats crosslegged sailor fashion, and ate with our fingers. The roast pig was the best I ever tasted, and everything else was good & I tasted all. There were some native dishes 'Poi', 'Popoi' & 'Taiero'²⁷ none of which were unpalatable. The breadfruit I do not think much of, though it not being the season for it here, they tell me it is not so good as it generally is. The feast went off very well though they had both wine & spirits passed round. I took the liberty of telling the King when I saw him mixing a glass of brandy & water that he had better let it alone, he smiled, but drank it. After we had dined the natives, a number of whom were outside, were admitted, and every thing eatable disappeared in a twinkling. I am glad I had the opportunity of seeing a feast got up in a native fashion, as it gave me a better idea of their manners, customs & food than any description could have given me. I meant after dinner to have gone to see Mr. Knott, but received a message from him that he was too unwell to see me today & requesting me to come some day next week. Tomorrow is Sunday, though our Saturday, in the morning I go to Church and in the evening dine at the French Consuls, with the Governor and other dignitaries—'When you are in Rome, do as the Romans do', I am obliged in some things to take for my motto.

Sept. 10th. Yesterday being Sunday I went to Church in the morning and heard a fair extemporaneous orthodox sermon from Mr. Moore the missionary stationed at Papaoa. Text Joshua 23 Chap. 11 Verse. In the afternoon dined at the French Consuls, with the French Governor and other dignitaries Am. Consul & Capt. of the French frigate. In the evening attended a religious meeting at Mr. Pritchards. A Danish schooner arrived from the Marquesas islands bringing news that the French Admiral²⁸ was there—and also a letter from him, stating that from news he had recd. from France that he had no doubt but that the French King had accepted the Protectorate of the island. The Queen was much troubled at the news, and is also in trouble on account of the illness of her youngest child,²⁹ & only daughter I believe. Two more whalers have arrived, Americans. In a conversation today with Mr. Pritchard, I mentioned the reply that I had heard made to Dr. Johnson's question, as to whether there were any sober (temperance) people on the island. He

said 'you heard this from one of the young missionaries I presume'. I did not undeceive him (it was from his own wife). He then said 'that is going rather too far for I myself know two or three, whom I believe to be strictly observant of the Christian rules, and worthy members of the church'. Two or three out of a population of eight thousand, or even if he spoke of this district, containing about 1400 people, with a congregation of 800 and a church of near two hundred communicants—a mortifying confession. I again urged upon him the absolute necessity of getting up a total abstinence society. He replied that there was to be a general meeting of the Missionaries on Thursday week when he would bring the subject before them, and do all he could to further the good work, and that he would cheerfully give up the few glasses of wine he was accustomed to drink. Mr. Smee the printer told me that he & Mr. Moore were the only teetotallers that he knew, belonging to the mission on the island. Today I dined with Mr. Blackler and ate too much. Tomorrow dine on board the French frigate & mean to eat less. As dear 'Mo' says I am so sleepy I can write no more so good night to all of you.

Sept. 12th. Yesterday as I mentioned above, I dined on board the French frigate and had a very pleasant time. The dinner was handsomely got up. The French Governors, Capt. of the port, French & American Consuls, with the first Lieutenant & Surgeon formed the dinner party. No toasts were drank, and I ate just enough. The French Captain has a fine collection of shells. I offered him some of mine that I had collected, and he appointed this morning at 10 o'clock to come & see them and said that he should expect me to return on board with him and get some of his. At nine o'clock I visited the mission school and was much interested, there were about one hundred fine looking children from fifteen to four years of age. Mr. Buchanan had them under pretty good discipline, though the school has been under his charge but a little while. They were commencing to learn English, answered pretty well in the simple rules of Arithmetic, he using the arithmetical machine, and appeared a pleasant good natured & intelligent set of chicks as you would wish to see. At ten the French Captain was at my rooms, and I gave him a fair proportion of the shells I had collected. We then adjourned to the frigate, where he loaded two baskets with some valuable shells for me, bringing me in his debt which I have promised to pay by sending him some American fresh water shells when I return home. At one o'clock I took a whale boat with five natives, the son of one

of the missionaries, and two young ladies, the granddaughters of Mr. Henry another missionary, and pulled up to Point Venus, about nine miles from here, the place where Walls & Cook first landed. It is classic ground. It was the place also where the first missionaries were stationed. The two districts contain about eight hundred inhabitants and about four hundred attend general divine service. Mr. Wilson one of the second lot of missionaries still lives there with his wife though the districts are under the charge of Mr. McKeen³⁰ who has been here about 18 months and is a very gentlemanly man with a pleasant woman for a wife and a beautiful boy who took a fancy to me and whom I kissed (not the wife, but the boy) till I almost sufficated him, trying all the time to think him to be dear Mo. Mr. Wilson is over seventy years of age, and his wife appears to be near the same age. He was not an educated man but evidently seems a very excellent one. We were two hours pulling there, remained there two more, had a good cup of tea & some 'flapjacks' & were one hour & twenty minutes sailing back having passed a very pleasant afternoon. I arranged with the French captain to start tomorrow morning on a shell collecting excursion, into the interior.

Sept. 13th. This morning at $\frac{1}{2}$ past 4 was out of bed, and $\frac{1}{2}$ past 5 the Captain called, and we started. The party was composed of the Capt., first lieutenant, Dr. Johnstone, whom I have mentioned before, two sailors from the frigate, one Sandwich Islander & myself. We had a fine walk of about five miles when we came to the entrance of one of the narrow vallies, and the path became difficult, and uncomfortable, we had a stream to cross often on the backs of our attendants, and the path was either filled with stones or obstructed by the roots of the Purau. At 9 we breakfasted, and at eleven I gave up, and with Dr. J. commenced our return, leaving the others to continue their route. At $\frac{1}{2}$ past 2 we got back myself at any rate being pretty tired & foot sore having walked at the least twenty-five miles. After having bathed & dressed and taken a short nap, I felt restored and ate a hearty supper and am pretty sure of a sound sleep tonight. I collected quite a stock of land and fresh water shells, none of which as I think are new. The Captain is a great walker & said he should keep up for two hours more at least. On my return saw old 'Praita'³¹ the former Regent of this island, sitting on a pile with the water up to his knees fishing and half drunk and was introduced & shook hands with the King of Raiatea,³² wholly drunk. A drunken set from the highest to the lowest. At 5 P.M. walked to Mr. Pritchards and

to the mission house to bid them good bye. The Captain telling me that we were to sail the day after tomorrow. Tomorrow bid the Queen and French Government good bye and in the afternoon if possible go to see old Mr. Knott again (Now I think of it I will say that I meant to send you home some shells from here, but as I have not had time to arrange them and pack them as I could wish, I must wait till I get to Honolulu). We shall stop on our way to the Sandwich Islands, at the next island, Eimeo, for a few hours, which I am glad of, as I wished to see it. Every one says it is a beautiful island and I meant to have gone over and passed a day with Mr. Simpson³³ the missionary there, had there been time. I am told that he is very kind & hospitable; and now as I have probably done with the missionaries, I will say that I have found them very kind, hospitable, and worthy men, as far as I can judge, and I trust they will prove more energetic than the first batch that came over, which as they are better educated, and so fitter for their business, is likely to be the case. Mr. Buchanan, the missionary of this station is apparently well calculated for the service, and Mrs. B. is as fine amicable little woman as you may see in a thousand. Under a good government, with good laws, well executed, and the temperance banner spread, I have no doubt they will do good. 10 P.M. They are all drunk in the next house and fighting, the house is in the yard of 'Praitā' the former regent. They are making a tremendous uproar but I am so tired & sleepy that I am going to bed anyhow.

14th. I went to bed, but it was not until the police (who by the by are as bad as the rest) came and took a drunken noisy female brute off to the stocks that I could go to sleep. I went to the door & sung out 'Momo' silence & 'Hare'³⁴ be off till I was hoarse, but it had no effect, she was too drunk to mind me, or even the 'Havas'³⁵ or constables who in taking her to the lock up house dragged her through a small stream which runs by the house I live in. It might have cooled her, but had no effect to stop her noise, which lasted till she was out of hearing. Today I have been to make my farewell visits to the officials & Queen. Tomorrow my baggage goes on board. If anything should happen to prevent our sailing, I mean to ride up to Bunaauia about nine or ten miles from here where Mr. Darling one of the oldest missionaries resides. I have been getting out the meats from [?] and packing my shells, and packing my trunks so that tomorrow I shall be my own man. I now shall close this long letter of 22 pages and hope that it may afford you as much pleasure in

reading as it has given me to write it, and that you will not be in my debt very long. Write often & good long letters telling me all the news. I do not wish my letters shewn round to every one. You know who I should like to see them if they wish to, and for fear you may make a mistake, I will recapitulate them with love & kind remembrance. Mr. Thayer & wife & cousin Mr Bridge, Mrs. Kilham family, Mrs. Everetts do. Dr Torrey & wife Capt. Pearson & wife, Mrs. L. Lawson, Fanny Abbot & husband, Capt. Asa Woodbury's family, Albert Thorndike, Stepheny Baker & R. Rantoul Jr. from all of whom I hope to receive letters, and all of whom I wish to consider this as Confidential. And now my dear wife & children God bless you, and have you in his keeping. Yrs. affy. G. BROWN

Of course you will remember me kindly to all enquiring friends whether I have mentioned them or not.

LETTER TWO

On board Brig Catherine at Sea.
Septr. 24th 1843

My dear Wife Children & friends.

We sailed from Tahiti on the morning of the 17th. having been detailed a day longer than I expected by the scantiness of the wind. On the 15th I called upon the Queen & took my leave of her. She was in a different house from the one in which I saw her before. This was a very large native house. I should think it at least one hundred feet long by forty wide and open all round. Indeed it was nothing more than some posts driven in the ground with a thatched roof. When the weather is bad there are curtains to let down on the windward side. I went with the American & English Consuls and was politely received. I found her sitting upon a mat spread upon the ground along side of her bedstead. There were some five or six other beds in the house (which had no partition being all open) on which were lying either men or women, and a number of females were sitting, and working with their needles, on mats spread on the ground. I told her I came to bid her good bye. She wished me a pleasant passage and that I might be successful in all my undertakings. I then referred to the conversation I had had with her before in regard to temperance and hoped she had thought of what I had said. She replied that she had, & would do all she could to further that

good cause, and again repeated that she would bring it before the chiefs when they met. I requested her to give me her autograph in my album which she cheerfully did, after she understood the intention of the thing, and I then shook hands & took my leave. On the 15th I sent my baggage aboard the vessel in the morning, and at $\frac{1}{2}$ past eleven started on horseback for Bunaauia a missionary station about nine miles to the westward of Papeete. I was accompanied by Mr. Darling³⁶ the son of the missionary settled there. We arrived at about 2 P.M. having been caught in a shower of rain and remained in a native house about half an hour, where I obtained an outside coat, and the worst of the shower being over pursued our way, arriving with but little damage. We found dinner already & I had acquired by my ride a good appetite for it. I found Mr. Darling a hale good looking man of, as I should think, about sixty years old, with his wife and two buxom daughters, which was all his family at home. One daughter the eldest was at Point Venus, at Mr. Wilson's. After dinner the rain being over I walked to see Utami³⁷ the chief of the district who lives a few rods from the missionary house. He is a fine noble looking man, about sixty five years of age with a young wife his second but no children. He had a number of children by his first wife, but they were all destroyed, according to the native custom in old times, as his first wife was a grade inferior to himself. His house was by far the best native house I had seen on the island with the exception of the Queens. He was very civil and on parting presented me with a stick made from the Fara³⁸ tree, the leaves of which are used to thatch the houses. It is a very hard and a beautiful grained wood. The house of Mr. Darling is old and decayed, and the natives are building another near the old one which will be very large and convenient. After remaining about two hours & a half at Bunauiua we left and arrived at Papeete before sundown having passed quite a pleasant time. The road is capable of being made a very fine one and with but little trouble, but is now hardly fit for even a horse being very narrow (indeed nothing more than what would be called a cow path at home) and the limbs of the Guava trees in many places hanging so low, as to compel you to lie upon the neck of your horse. We passed some most delightful building spots and situations, that some of our rich men would give thousands to have within five miles of Boston. I am perfectly delighted with the climate and situation of Tahiti. It might be made a Paradise in the right kind of hands. On the 16th. I dined at Mr. Blacklers with all the American masters & Supercargoes, and in the evening, took tea at Mr. Henry's, the

son of the oldest missionary. Mrs. H. is a fine bouncing woman with a nice lot of children, the youngest about four months old, and big enough for a year old baby, remarkably good natured. Of course you may be sure I had her in my arms for a good space. I forgot to say that this being Sunday at Tahiti I went to Church in the morning and heard a pretty good sermon from Mr. Pritchard. At 6 A.M. of the 17th. we left Tahiti, with a light air, the Brig being towed out of the harbor by the boats of the French Corvette and the Am. whale ships. We were becalmed the whole of the forenoon between Tahiti & Eimeo and did not arrive off the harbor of Taloo³⁹ untill about three o'clock. I went on shore with the Captain in his whale boat at a plantation about four miles from the entrance, where he had some business which I found to be the procuring of live stock for our passage. There had been however a heavy freshet the night previous inundating all the low ground, so that the fowls had all escaped into the interior and we could procure nothing but pigs on which up to this time we have been living. We have had roast pig & boiled pig fresh pig and corned pig broiled pig & fried pig curried pig & pigs head soup stewed pig and hashed pig & minced pig, but we get along so much better than on the last miserable craft that I don't complain. I had but fifteen minutes to spare to call upon Mr. Simpson the missionary at Papetoai, which I much regretted, as I liked him much from the little I saw of him. His house is by far the best and in the best order of any I have seen. The grounds round are in good taste and kept neat, and there was an air of comfort about the whole that I have nowhere else met with. He regretted my short stay and hoped I should return at some future time and spend some time with him making his house my home. Mrs. Simpson was a good motherly looking woman and is well educated. She has three of Mr. Pritchard's daughters staying with her, and one daughter of her own a girl of about fourteen I should think. At sundown I left in a whale boat, loaded with pigs, cocoanuts & sugar cane for the Brig outside, which we reached in about half an hour. On getting on board I found that the pigs were to be paid for in Rum and a cask that came off in one of the whale boats from the shore was filled with the cursed stuff for the purpose of poisoning the poor natives. I learnt that drunkenness was fully as common at Eimeo as at Tahiti, but the other vices not so common on account of there being less communication with foreigners. We have now been seven days at sea and have got about 1/4 of our passage so far, the winds having been well to the NE & light, though we are in the range of the S.E. trades. Having brought

up my journal so far I shall put it aside for the present not expecting any thing of moment will occur till my arrival. By the by I forgot to say that Mr. Simpson pointed me out at Eimeo the spot where the first idols in the South Sea were burnt and I stood upon the ground.⁴⁰ It seems a large collection of people had collected round the place where the pile was erected, and by so doing, kept off the air so that the idols would not burn and they began to shout in derision. Mr Henry one of the missionaries with great presence of mind requested the people to extend the circle and open it towards the wind, which on being done, the flames burst forth, and the idols were consumed, amid the astonishment and shouts of a race redeemed from paganism.

Ship Cyane 26th Octr. 1843 I arrived at Honolulu on the 16th in good health and am now on board the Cyane for Maui to deliver my credentials to the King.⁴¹ Yesterday I was received on board of the Cyane with a salute of 13 Guns. The English Frigate Champion arrived yesterday, and this morning I am informed that the Eng. Sloop of war Hazard leaves here for Mazatlan on Saturday. I have no time therefore to write you a long letter, as I intended, but shall as soon as possible, giving you all the information.

I wish you would send my letters to Mr. Pierce in Boston, the same to whom the box was sent, with a request to forward them to me via Mexico, and pay him the postage (or you can put them in the Post Office at Beverly, directed thus, paying the Postage to New Orleans. G.B. Com. to Sandwich Islands care of John Parrott Esqr Consul of the U States, Mazatlan Mexico, via New Orleans. The best way however is to send to Mr. Pierce or Hunnewell who will forward them by the way of N. York & Vera Cruz. Give my best love to all friends and keep the children for me.

Yrs. very affy
GB

NOTES

¹ See Ralph S. Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, vol. 1, 1778-1854, *Foundation and Transformation* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1938) 203, 234-237, and 247-251. For the specific background to Tahiti at this period, see: Paul de Deckker, ed., *The Aggressions of the French at Tahiti and other Islands in the Pacific*, by George Pritchard (Auckland: Auckland UP, 1983); J. P. Faivre, *L'Expansion Française dans le Pacifique de 1800 à 1842* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines 1953); and Colin Newbury, *Tahiti Nui: Change and Survival in French Polynesia 1767-1945* (Honolulu: UP of Hawaii, 1980).

- ² Possibly a Tahitian district official, or *tavana*, and a friend of Pritchard, but he is not mentioned again.
- ³ The *Vindictive*, under the command of Capt. J. Toup Nicolas, had brought Pritchard back to Tahiti on 24 February 1843. Despite his orders to leave as soon as possible, Nicolas delayed at Tahiti until 6 August, seeking to counter French influence. Brown discreetly withholds the name of this vessel. By 1843 the British squadron on the South American coast consisted of seven vessels—three 50-gun frigates, a 26-gun sloop, the steamer *Salamander*, and a ketch *Basilisk* used as a tender, which may well be the one referred to here. Other sources suggest the *Basilisk* (Capt. Hunt) did not arrive till January 1844, so precise identification must remain in doubt.
- ⁴ British Consul at Panama.
- ⁵ Rather, Cocos island, 540 miles from Panama and some 300 miles southwest of Costa Rica.
- ⁶ Magdalena, or Fatu Hiva.
- ⁷ Samuel R. Blackler was appointed to replace J. A. Moerenhout in 1837, arriving at his post in 1839, where he remained until his death in 1845. See Richard A. Greer, "Trouble in Tahiti: S.R. Blackler's Despatches on the French Seizure of the Society Island," *HJH* 5 (1971): 127-151.
- ⁸ Papeete had two hotels at this date—Segar's Washington Hotel and the Hotel Franklin run by John Rogers and George Cain, expropriated by the French in 1844.
- ⁹ A reference to Lord George Paulet's initiative in declaring a protectorate over the Hawaiian islands in February 1843, which was disavowed by the British government and formally ended in July 1843.
- ¹⁰ That is, J.A. Moerenhout, consul and "commissioner" to the Queen, and Lieutenants Edouard de Carpegna and Edouard Reine. There was no French "governor" until the arrival of Armand Bruat in November.
- ¹¹ Queen Pomare and her consort Ari'ifaite a Hiro (1821-1883).
- ¹² A fair estimate for Pomare (1813-1877).
- ¹³ Probably Uata Pomare's foster father and speaker (*awaha'a*).
- ¹⁴ Ari'iaue (1835-1855).
- ¹⁵ Under the flags of the Leeward Islands and the Tahitian flag.
- ¹⁶ Probably the *Embuscade* under command of Capt. Mallet.
- ¹⁷ Temperance societies had been formed at Tahiti and in the Leeward group in 1834 but had evidently lapsed. The missionaries were equally concerned at this date. T. S. McKean, letter to directors, 3 Sept. 1843, and William Howe, letter to directors, 28 Sept. 1843, South Seas 16/3, London Missionary Society (hereafter cited as LMS). The Hawaiian King and Queen were Kamehameha III and Kalama.
- ¹⁸ An error which was not officially rectified until 1848. It causes a certain confusion in the dating of local correspondence.
- ¹⁹ John Barff (1820-1860), son of Charles Barff, the missionary, and born at Raiatea. He was ordained in 1844.
- ²⁰ Sic. Henry Nott (1774-1844) one of the *Duff* missionaries who arrived in 1797. His precarious situation was reported to the directors by Mrs. Nott, 21 January 1844, South Seas 17/1, LMS. His salary was not stopped.
- ²¹ Née A. Turner, one of the original "pious young females" sent out to Sydney by the directors in 1809 as missionary spouses.
- ²² William Henry (1770-1859) who died at Ryde, New South Wales.
- ²³ Charles Wilson (1770-1857) also a *Duff* pioneer, and then a passenger in the contingent which reached Tahiti on the *Royal Admiral* in 1801.

- ²⁴ For Tahiti and Mo'orea, 9,454 in the census of 1848.
- ²⁵ Alfred Smee (1815-1847) arrived in 1841 as mission printer.
- ²⁶ A revised Code of Laws for 1842, printed in 1843. For a discussion of these codes and the 1842 revision, see C.W. Newbury, *The History of the Tahitian Mission 1799-1830*, by John Davies, Hakluyt Society, 2nd Series 106 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1961. 365-377.
- ²⁷ Sic: *poe* (baked roots of *pia*, *taro*); *Poboi* (a pudding from the plantain); *taiero* (a sauce of coconut, shrimps, and salt water).
- ²⁸ Dupetit-Thouars who arrived with Governor Bruat at the Marquesas posts in October 1843. The French Government had approved the provisional Protectorate 7 April 1843.
- ²⁹ Teari'i Maeva Rua, born in 1841.
- ³⁰ T.S. McKean (1807-1844), killed the following year by a stray shot during an engagement between the French and Tahitians.
- ³¹ Paraita (1787-1865) an *Iatoai*, or official of junior rank, and occasional "regent" during Pomare's visits to Mo'orea and the Leeward Islands; also one of the signatories to the request for a French Protectorate in September 1842.
- ³² Tamatoa IV who adopted Pomare's third son as his successor.
- ³³ Alexander Simpson (1801-1866), teacher and director of the "Academy" at Papetoai, married to Pritchard's sister-in-law, also a teacher.
- ³⁴ Sic: *mamu*, *haere*.
- ³⁵ The *ha'ava* were judges, not constables (*mutoi*).
- ³⁶ Adam Darling, perhaps, also interpreter for the French administration.
- ³⁷ Utami, also a signatory to the request for French protection.
- ³⁸ *Fara* (pandanus).
- ³⁹ Or Tareu in Papetoai district, Mo'orea. The plantation may have been at Opunohu.
- ⁴⁰ This episode is described in Newbury, ed., *History of the Tahitian Mission*, by Davies 193-194 and 236.
- ⁴¹ Presumably Kauikeaouli, or Kamehameha III.